

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
SELECT BOARD REGULAR MEETING
Minutes of February 8, 2022**

- I. ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair K. David Maxwell, Board members Julie H. Goodrich (absent), Nathaniel Miller, Charles Morse, and John Stevens. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Merry Shernock, Steve Fitzhugh, Tim Swartz, Cassie Morse, Carolyn Stevens, and Elroy Hill.

Chair Maxwell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Participants had the option of attending the meeting either in person or remotely through Go-to-Meeting.

- II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE.** Those persons present were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The remote contingent also participated as much as possible.

- III. SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** There were no changes to the posted agenda.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

- a. Merry Shernock: ARPA Funds Community Engagement Process.** Ms. Shernock volunteered at a previous meeting (11/23/21) to assist the Select Board members develop strategies for obtaining public feedback on how the \$1,900,000 in American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds Northfield will receive should be spent. More recently Ms. Shernock viewed a Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD) workshop on this topic and has a number of recommendations based on what she learned. One of the first things she discovered was that this project was much too large for one person. Therefore, Ms. Shernock recommends the formation of a special planning committee along with a public relations task force. She has identified more than thirty-five (35) individuals from six (6) different neighborhoods who might be willing to serve on the committee. This should provide diverse representation. Ms. Shernock also recommends that public meetings should be held where local residents already congregate on a regular basis. These would include the Falls General Store, the Brown Public Library's Community Room, the Northfield Senior Center, American Legion Post #63, and the Woods at Wihakowi. Persons associated with these locations have agreed to assist with the process. Ms. Shernock thought the Transfer Station and/or the CERV Food Shelf would make good locations to interact with the public but neither has proper meeting facilities. In addition, the Northfield public schools were considered but they are not yet open to members of the public due to the ongoing pandemic.

Ms. Shernock also learned from the VCRD workshop that other communities benefited by having trained and experienced facilitators present at the public outreach meetings. She believes VCRD, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC), and the Vermont League of Cities & Towns (VLCT) might be possible sources for facilitators. Ms. Shernock felt ARPA funds could be used to hire a professional facilitator. As for the meetings themselves, Ms. Shernock felt they should be hybrid with both in-person and remote meeting capability. Perhaps Trans-Video could assist with this. She also felt the meetings should be scheduled for weekday evenings and perhaps Saturday afternoons. The meeting hosts would be at least one Select Board member and the facilitator. Light refreshments would be provided and a notetaker should be present. The meetings should last no longer than ninety (90) minutes. Ms. Shernock felt it would be best if the process were completed by Memorial Day since after then many Northfield residents turn their attention to outdoor activities, out-of-state vacations, etc.

Ms. Shernock felt the public meetings should have two (2) components. The first would be a general explanation of ARPA funding, the local amount available, usages that have been approved and/or encouraged by the federal government, etc. The second would be listening to any suggestions from residents regarding how these funds should be spent. Other than her recommendation that the process should be completed before summer, Ms. Shernock believes the project timeline should be developed by the special planning committee. Therefore, the first step in the process should be forming this committee as soon as possible.

Chair Maxwell asked if the Select Board members had any questions regarding Ms. Shernock's proposal. Board member Miller had no questions but was grateful for all the work she has already provided on this. Board member Miller said he would be willing to assist in any way to help further the process. Board member Morse also was appreciative of Ms. Shernock's efforts. He added that Manager Schulz could assist by identifying how much ARPA funding would be available for the various major project categories that have already been identified, i.e. infrastructure upgrades, expanded broadband internet access, etc. Board member Stevens had no questions but would like to offer a motion. Motion by Board member Stevens, seconded by Board member Morse, to authorize the formation of an ARPA Community Engagement Committee to be in place no later than March 22, 2022. Board member Morse asked if that date was feasible. Chair Maxwell said since potential members already have been identified, it should be possible to hold an organizational meeting in the near future with Ms. Shernock as the interim chair. Ms. Shernock said the ultimate choice on who would lead the committee should be made by the members themselves. Chair Maxwell confirmed he is fully in support of Ms. Shernock's efforts and pledged to invest his time and efforts whenever needed. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

- b. Steve Fitzhugh, Northfield Electric Utility Commission Chair: Northfield Electric Department (NED) System Reliability.** Mr. Fitzhugh was asked by Manager Schulz to address the Select Board members regarding public concerns that electric outages are getting to be a local problem. Mr. Fitzhugh provided the Select Board members with NED outage reports from the last five (5) calendar years. He said the frequency and length of power outages are defined by various metrics, the main ones being SAIFI and CAIDI. SAIFI (System Average Interruption Frequency Index) measures how many times the average customer experiences a "sustained interruption" over a predetermined period of time, i.e. a calendar year. A "sustained interruption" refers to a power outage lasting more than five (5) minutes. CAIDI (Customer Average Interruption Duration Index) measures how long it takes until service is restored to the average customer. The Public Service Board (PSB) provides each utility with target numbers for these metrics and historically NED has been one of the more reliable power systems. NED had a relatively good year in 2020 with only twelve (12) power outages but service restoration did take an average of 2.21 hours. In 2021, there were twenty (20) outages that required an average of 2.83 hours for service restoration. The number and length of power outages are the result of numerous factors with the major causes being trees (on lines), bad weather, planned outages, equipment failure, etc. A significant problem is the result of animals, especially squirrels, damaging utility equipment and such outages are often quite lengthy. Protective devices known as "squirrel guards" have been installed at various locations, including the substation, to reduce this risk.

Mr. Fitzhugh said if you look at NED's SAIFI and CAIDI numbers over the past decade, it appears that 2021 was an average year for power outages. In 2021, trees were responsible for the most outages (7) and NED has tried in recent years to address this problem with an aggressive tree-trimming policy. Weather events are a less frequent cause but often take longer to resolve as repair crews have to deal with numerous problem areas at the same time. Mr. Fitzhugh said there have been significant upgrades at the King Street Substation in recent years and this has shortened the duration of NED power outages. A problematic electric switch near Tops Market will be replaced in the near future and bypassed in the interim. There also are overhead line problems in the Union Street area that probably result from construction work done there about twenty (20) years ago. A work order has been filed with Green Mountain Power (GMP), with whom NED contracts for line maintenance, to fix this by installing new fuses, checking all connections, etc.

Mr. Fitzhugh concluded by saying NED's power system is in good shape and GMP performs its contracted obligations well. He added that there might be a need to increase NED's power capacity in coming years should there be a population increase, should electric car charging become more common, etc. Chair Maxwell then asked if the Select Board members had any questions. Board member Morse said we are fortunate to have a great public works crew. Chair Maxwell added that the community also is very fortunate to have Mr. Fitzhugh himself as a resource for all information regarding public utilities, etc. Mr. Fitzhugh said he was pleased to provide his expertise at any time. Chair Maxwell noted that the local power outages in 2021, despite it being an average year for them, probably resulted in more public concern and complaints than in past years due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that forced many residents to work and/or attend school at home.

V. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

a. Liquor License Renewals

- 1. Convenience Plus.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- 2. Falls General Store.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- 3. Good Measure Brewing.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

b. Outside Consumption Permit

- 1. Good Measure Brewing.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the outside consumption permit. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. January 25, 2022 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the minutes. Board member Morse had one correction: it was not he who asked why the proposed municipal employee COVID-19 vaccine requirement was on the meeting agenda. This error will be fixed. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Approval of Warrant #15-22.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve Warrant #15-22 in the amount of \$463,156.12. Chair Maxwell asked about a \$18,808 credit from the Vermont Public Power Supply Authority (VPPSA). Manager Schulz said this was a dividend payment due to the Northfield Electric Department (NED) purchasing Transco stock. It also was noted that of the total warrant amount, \$272,246.35 represented power purchased for NED that will be later resold to its customers. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Approval of Biweekly Payroll through January 23, 2022.** Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the biweekly payroll in the amount of \$106,817.12. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

VIII. SELECT BOARD

- a. **South Main Street Stormwater/CSO Elimination Project Engineering Agreement.** Manager Schulz said this lengthy document was delivered to the Select Board members in their packets for the last meeting (01/25/22) so they would have sufficient time to read it before making a decision tonight. He added that the engineering plans for this project are nearly complete so we now are trying to have all the required paperwork finished before going out to bid for the construction phase. This agreement is required by the State of Vermont, which will be funding almost all of the engineering services for this project. Manager Schulz said despite its length, this is a standard agreement for such a project. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and authorize Manager Schulz to sign this agreement. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- b. **Engineering Services Agreement: Water Line Replacement on Main Street Bridge.** Manager Schulz said the replacement of the Main Street Bridge will require replacement of the utility lines in the area including a water main. This agreement would cover the relocation of this water main at a cost of approximately \$40,000. The State of Vermont would cover almost all of this expense. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve and authorize Manager Schulz to sign this agreement. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- c. **Approval of Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) Certificate of Highway Mileage.** Manager Schulz said VTrans requires each municipality every year to certify the amount of highway mileage by class in the community and note any changes from the previous year. The only local change in 2021 was the reduction in the amount of Class 3 highway by one tenth of a mile due to the discontinuance of Bellemore Road. VTrans will be provided documentation of this action when the approved certificate is forwarded to them. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve the VTrans Certificate of Highway Mileage. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**
- d. **Northfield Transfer Station Agreement.** Manager Schulz said there have been some new developments regarding this proposed agreement since the last meeting. As these matters involve contract negotiation, he felt it best this discussion was held in executive session. There was no objection.
- e. **Select Board Public Hearing (Town Meeting Articles): Tuesday, February 22, 2022.** Manager Schulz said this public hearing is an annual requirement as it allows residents to ask questions or make comments on items to be voted upon by Australian Ballot. It also provides an opportunity for the non-profit organizations seeking public funds to provide additional information or answer questions. Board member Morse noted that because of COVID-19, voting on all the articles this year is by Australian Ballot and residents should be made aware of their voting options.

IX. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. **Northfield Town Report 2022.** Manager Schulz said this year's town report has been delivered to the printer and hardcopies should be returned for public distribution by the end of next week. An electronic version (PDF) can be downloaded at <https://www.northfield-vt.gov/town-reports>.
- b. **Main Street Bridge Replacement Project.** As requested by the Select Board, Manager Schulz has had oversized copies of the bridge replacement project presentation from the last regular meeting placed for public view in the Municipal Building and the Brown Public Library. An electronic version (PDF) also can be downloaded at <https://www.northfield-vt.gov/public-notice>. Manager Schulz has already received a number of interesting comments and recommendations.
- c. **Municipal Computer Server Replacement.** Manager Schulz said this project originally was planned for last year but we were able to get an additional year out of the current server through a warranty extension. However, this will need to be done by the end of this calendar year. The Select Board members will see some invoices for this soon. There had been some discussion regarding whether documents would be stored on the Cloud or if computer hardware would be needed for sensitive documents. There probably be some combination of the two systems.
- d. **Designated Village Center.** Manager Schulz said there has been some recent conversation about perhaps enlarging the Designated Village Center in the downtown area to include some additional parcels. This will be discussed further at the next regular meeting (02/22/22).

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Culvert Inventory.** Board member Stevens received the information he requested from Manager Schulz regarding the Highway Department's culvert inventory. He learned that not as much culvert has been purchased as he previously thought.
- b. **Town Highway Crew Appreciation.** Chair Maxwell wanted to thank Northfield's Highway crew for their excellent response to last week's heavy snowstorm. He understands some new crew members have been taken on as seasonal employees and he hopes the public will recognize they are subject to a learning curve.

XI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

XII. EXECUTIVE SESSION. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to go into executive session, in accordance with 1 VSA 313 (a)(1), in order to discuss a contract negotiation with Manager Schulz present. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board went into executive session at 8:05 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to come out of executive session. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board came out of executive session at 8:19 p.m.

Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to approve a one (1) year extension of the municipal contract with All Clean Waste Services to operate the Northfield Transfer Station. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

XIII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Board member Morse, seconded by Board member Stevens, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The Board adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the Select Board regular meeting of February 22, 2022.